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ICONOLOGY AND BYZANTINE STUDIES

Hugo Buchthal

Interviewed by Richard Cándida Smith

Art History Oral Documentation Project

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Frontispiece: Hugo Buchthal, 1989. Photograph courtesy of Hugo Buchthal.



## CONTENTS

Biographical Summary . . . . .	vii
--------------------------------	-----

### SESSION ONE: AUGUST 30, 1993 (126 minutes)

TAPE I, SIDE ONE . . . . .	1
----------------------------	---

Family background—An avid love of music during childhood—Interest in art as a student—Family Jewish, but not observant—Training in Greek, Latin, and Arabic—Enrollment at the University of Heidelberg to study medieval philosophy and art—A year at the Sorbonne studying with Etienne Gilson and Henri Focillon—Emile Mâle's work and his reputation as a scholar—How Focillon and Erwin Panofsky viewed the question of style—Decision to study with Panofsky at the University of Hamburg—Selection of dissertation topic: the Paris Psalter—Comparison of Wilhelm Pinder and Panofsky—First meeting with Kurt Weitzmann while visiting Adolph Goldschmidt in Berlin—Panofsky's misgivings about the sloppy use of iconology—Making the most of Panofsky's office hours—Panofsky's inner circle—Fritz Saxl's teaching methods in seminars—Training of the eyes—Saxl as an administrator—A summer in Istanbul and Vienna—Saxl's role in the creation of the Warburg Institute—Intellectual currents in 1920s Germany and their significance for the Warburg circle.

TAPE I, SIDE TWO . . . . .	21
----------------------------	----

Martin Heidegger—Ernst Kantorowicz—Panofsky's openness toward students—Working with the Paris Psalter in the Bibliothèque Nationale—Debate with Weitzmann over the origin of personification imagery in the Paris Psalter—Debate with Charles Rufus Morey over the dating of the Paris Psalter—Classes in Latin paleography with Richard Salomon—Panofsky's requirements for comprehensive examinations—Fond memories of Hans Liebeschütz—Relationship of classical archaeology to Byzantine studies—Oral examination for doctorate in 1933—Musical



preferences—Importance of Fritz Saxl to Buchthal’s postdoctoral studies—Differences between Byzantine and Western medievalism—Iconoclasm—Central role of iconology in Buchthal’s studies—Iconology versus stylistic analysis—Panofsky on the use of photographs versus working with originals—Studying Byzantine iconography with Gabriel Millet—American University in Beirut—Panofsky’s knowledge of Byzantine art.

TAPE II, SIDE ONE . . . . . 40

Buchthal recalls Hamburg as a liberal city with little support for the Nazis—Acquaintances who became Nazis—Question of nationalism—Distortion of Heinrich Wölfflin’s ideas to promote nationalism—Buchthal’s decision to emigrate in 1933—Reception in England—Financial difficulties through the 1930s—Colleagues at the Warburg Institute and the British Museum—Comparison of German and British attitudes toward art history—Buchthal focuses on turning his dissertation into a book—Work as Warburg Institute librarian during World War II—Internment as enemy alien at the beginning of the war.

**SESSION TWO: AUGUST 31, 1993 (85 minutes)**

TAPE III, SIDE ONE . . . . . 52

Complete separation of Byzantine art history from all other aspects of Byzantine studies—Byzantine manuscripts almost always biblical or liturgical—Importance of evangelists’ portraits in Byzantine painting—More on the Paris Psalter—Interest in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Islamic art—Work on the Psalter of Queen Melisende—Discovery and identification of twenty manuscripts from the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem—Research at Mount Sinai—Relationship of mosaic art to book illumination—Saxl puts Buchthal to work on Gandharan sculpture during World War II—Comparison of Buchthal’s iconological interpretation of Gandharan art with Foucher’s stylistic approach—Parallel research findings by archaeologists in Gandhara—Saxl as the guiding spirit of Buchthal’s career—Slow development of the Warburg Institute’s teaching program—Anthony Blunt as a man and as director of the





Courtauld Institute—International community of Byzantine scholars—Byzantinists in Russia—More on theoretical and methodological premises of Buchthal's work—Byzantine lectionary manuscripts—Munich as a center for Byzantine studies—Research in Egypt—Studies in Coptic and Syriac art—Metropolitan and provincial art—Buchthal compares his work and vision with that of Weitzmann—*Historia Troiana*—Archival work in Madrid.

## TAPE III, SIDE TWO . . . . . 69

Buchthal lectures on early Christian and Byzantine art at the Warburg Institute—General lack of interest in Byzantine studies at University College London—A guest lectureship at Columbia University—Moving to the Institute of Fine Arts in 1965—Comparison of American and British university environments—Panofsky as a lecturer in the U.S.—Long-lasting relationships with American students—Comparison of "German" and "American" Panofsky—Albert Friend's influence on Kurt Weitzmann—Assessment of Morey's scholarship—Weitzmann's disagreements with Morey—Impact of Dumbarton Oaks on Byzantine studies—Sirarpie Der Nersessian—More on the centrality of Greco-Roman antiquity for iconology—The concept of the "migration of images"—Buchthal's lack of interest in semiotics, structuralism, or other theoretical discourses—The Byzantine field in the 1930s and today—Discoveries of new monuments—Working with Hans Belting on *Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople*—Relationship to Germany after 1945—Future directions in the Byzantine field—Importance of conservation—Wife's career and her interest in contemporary art and design—Otto Kurz—The division of labor in Buchthal's generation of art historians.

## Index . . . . . 86

Richard Cándida Smith, Assistant Professor of History at the University of Michigan, interviewed Hugo Buchthal at his home in London, England. A total of 3.51 hours were recorded. The transcript was edited by Katherine P. Smith.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PLACE AND DATE OF BIRTH: Berlin, 11 August, 1909.

### EDUCATION:

University of Heidelberg, mid to late 1920s.

Sorbonne, Paris, one year of study.

University of Hamburg, 1929-1933.

American University in Beirut, 1936-1937.

### MARRIAGE:

Amalia Serkin, 1939; one daughter.

### PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

Librarian, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1940-1945.

Lecturer in History of Art (Near East), University of London, 1949.

Professor, History of Byzantine Art, University of London, 1961.

Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, 1965-1975.

### PUBLICATIONS:

*The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter: A Study in Middle Byzantine Painting.* London: Warburg Institute, 1938.

*A Hand List of Illuminated Christian Manuscripts.* With Otto Kurz. London: Warburg Institute, 1942.



*The Western Aspects of Gandhara Sculpture.* Lahore: Taxila Publications, 1945.

*Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.* With liturgical and paleographical chapters by Francis Wormald. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.

*Historia Troiana: Studies in the History of Medieval Secular Illustration.* London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1971.

*Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople: An Atelier of Late Byzantine Book Illumination and Calligraphy.* With Hans Belting. Washington D.C: Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies, for the Trustees of Harvard University, 1978.

*The Musterbuch of Wolfenbüttel and its Position in the Art of the Thirteenth Century.* Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1979.

*Art of the Mediterranean World, 100 to 1400 AD.* Washington D.C: Decator House Press, 1983.





SESSION ONE: 30 AUGUST, 1993

[Tape I, Side One]

SMITH: We'll start with when and where you were born.

BUCHTHAL: I was born in Berlin on August 11, 1909, which means I am just 84 years old now.

SMITH: Could you tell me a little bit about your mother and your father?

BUCHTHAL: My father [Eugen] was also born in Berlin, but his family came from Westphalia, strangely enough from a place called Warburg; this name, in a different context later on, played a great role in my life because of the Warburg Institute. My mother's father was a Mecklenburger, he lived in Schwerin. Later on he transferred to Pomerania, and that's where he spent most of his life. He died there in 1918.

SMITH: What kind of work did your father do?

BUCHTHAL: He was a businessman, in textiles.

SMITH: Had he gone to the university?

BUCHTHAL: No.

SMITH: Were you the first in the family then to attend university?

BUCHTHAL: No, my mother [Theresa] had several close relatives who were highly regarded scholars. One was the director of the Berlin Solicitor's Association. He was a very respected person.



SMITH: What was the role of culture in your family life as you were growing up?

BUCHTHAL: As you see when you look around in this house, music was the outstanding art. We practiced it to some extent and listened to it a great deal. My wife [Amalia Serkin] and I still spend most of our evenings in this room listening to music.

SMITH: When did you become interested in art?

BUCHTHAL: I was interested from an early age. I organized art-historical sessions at school at the encouragement of our drawing master; that was my first contact with art. I remember one day he told us that the two wings of the Ghent Altarpiece by van Eyck which were housed in the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum had to be returned to Ghent according to the terms of the Versailles treaty. He advised us to go and have a look at them because we wouldn't have another chance so soon. On the following Sunday my parents took me for the first time to the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum. From then on I was in more or less continuous contact with the Berlin museums.

SMITH: This was the museum that Wilhelm von Bode was the director of?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, now it's called the Bode Museum, then it was called Kaiser-Friedrich Museum.

SMITH: Was there a section of those museums that you were most fond of?



BUCHTHAL: Yes, the old masters in the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum.

SMITH: So you liked the Pinakotek, the painting gallery?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Then, later on, when the new Pergamon Museum was opened, I was fascinated by the Pergamon Altarpiece.

SMITH: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BUCHTHAL: I have a brother [Wolfgang] and a sister [Anna Gerda], yes.

SMITH: Did they also go to the university?

BUCHTHAL: Well, my sister started on a kind of intellectual profession in orthopaedo-gymnastics, but she couldn't continue. She then went to Italy where she did continue for some years, but then here in London it slowly petered out. My brother was just a statistician.

SMITH: Was your family Jewish or Protestant?

BUCHTHAL: It was Jewish.

SMITH: Did you go to synagogue?

BUCHTHAL: Never. No, I am not observant, nor were my parents, nor were my grandparents, as far as I know.

SMITH: When I talked to Wolfgang Herrmann, he mentioned that he did not even know that he was Jewish until he was an adult.

BUCHTHAL: Well, that happened in several cases.

SMITH: But you did know that you were Jewish?



BUCHTHAL: Oh yes. My parents saw to that very strictly.

SMITH: So was there a strong sense of Jewish identity?

BUCHTHAL: No, not really. We liked to say, "We are Jewish, but we are not Jews." We were not observant in any way.

SMITH: What about the effects of inflation on your family?

BUCHTHAL: My father was comparatively lucky, as most of his textile clients lived abroad. He had income from Sweden and Holland and also Switzerland, so we managed comparatively well.

SMITH: What part of Berlin did you grow up in?

BUCHTHAL: Westend. Now it's called Theodor-Heuss Platz. It used to be Reichskanzlerplatz when I was young, and at that time it was entirely countrified. You heard the nightingales in the evenings. Then it was Adolf-Hitler Platz, and now it's Theodor-Heuss Platz. It's still a pleasant part of Berlin to live in. The house which our family inhabited is now owned by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, the singer, whom we always see when we go to Berlin, and when he gives concerts here. Once he had noticed after a few questions that I was not after his money, he was extremely nice. He may have dreaded that I would stake a claim, because he or whoever was before him in the house got it very cheaply.

SMITH: What about your initial education? Did you have a classical or a modern education?





BUCHTHAL: I had a classical education, but it really wasn't good enough. The school taught very little Greek, so even when I was at school I took private lessons in Greek and continued that later, and that of course stood me in good stead when I decided to specialize in Byzantine art. At the time I thought it was just lost time to sit about in a school and listen to uninspiring lectures. Looking back, now I am over eighty, I must say the school wasn't that bad at all and I got a lot out of it. My grounding in Latin was very good. Later, at university, when I took up medieval Latin texts, such as St. Anselm, my Latin proved quite adequate.

SMITH: Let me ask, since we're on the subject of languages now, how many languages do you work in?

BUCHTHAL: For my work I need English, German, French, and Italian, mostly, but I also read Spanish, if necessary. I speak very little, but I can get through when I'm in Spain. I learned classical Arabic on [Fritz] Saxl's initiative. Now I'm completely out of it because I did not take up Islamic art, as he had suggested at the time, but stuck to Byzantine. But I still read Arabic, and I was very amused when I was in Malta some years ago to find that I could read a Maltese newspaper. They are printed in Latin characters, but as it's a Semitic language I could understand practically every word. Semitic languages are very closely interrelated. After I learned Arabic, I didn't find it too difficult to switch



to Syriac and Hebrew and whatever else I needed.

SMITH: For your Gandhara studies, did you look into Sanskrit?

BUCHTHAL: No, I abandoned Gandhara mainly because I didn't know the language—Karoshti—and I thought one shouldn't meddle in things where one can't read the written documents.

SMITH: Do you know any Slavic languages?

BUCHTHAL: No, I'm afraid not. It's a great drawback.

SMITH: For Byzantine studies?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. When I studied, in the early 1930s, it was not so obvious that Slavic languages would be required. [Erwin] Panofsky would never have had the idea of telling me to learn Russian—none of his students did. Now it has turned out to be terribly important, and I am rather embarrassed by my lack of Russian.

SMITH: When you left the *Gymnasium*, which university did you decide to attend?

BUCHTHAL: First, Heidelberg, which was then a kind of elite university.

Many outstanding German scholars, like [Friedrich] Gundolf, taught at Heidelberg, but art history was not well represented. There was a vacancy, the *Ordinarius* had just retired. When a new one was appointed, he turned out to be a specialist in postmedieval art. So I decided to leave because this just did not



interest me so much.

SMITH: You had already decided that medieval art would be your main focus?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, that happened when I spent a year in Paris, which my parents very generously granted me after school. I attended the Sorbonne and just went to any lecture that pleased me, without any definite program. After listening to various lectures and various professors and various viewpoints, I finally decided, but when I went to Heidelberg I was still quite undecided between medieval philosophy and the history of medieval art. Medieval philosophy was very well taught at the Sorbonne at the time, and I kept contact with my French teachers and costudents up until the outbreak of the war.

SMITH: I understand you studied with Etienne Gilson and Henri Focillon?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: How closely did you get to know them?

BUCHTHAL: Well, one had to go after the lecture and have their signatures in the university booklet which one kept, and they were all very open. I made some friends among them, especially a teacher in history of religions, Jean Baruzi. I had some personal contact with Gilson, and also with Focillon, whom I venerated. He was not yet the occupant of the chair; the titular occupant was still his predecessor, Emile Mâle, who at that time was director of the French Institute in Rome, in the Palazzo Farnese. He had the title, but Focillon replaced him.





You may have read about Mâle. He played a very unsavory role during the First World War, when he pretended the Germans had bombed Rheims Cathedral on purpose. This went on and on and on, and he wrote articles and even books about the German character—"Once a German always a German"—but this discredited him, rather, as a human being. I met him only once and heard him lecture then. He lived to a very ripe old age, over ninety, and he was still alive when the Second World War broke out. He retired to a country seat which belonged to the Académie française, and there he died quietly during the war. His main books were *L'art religieux du XIIe siècle en France*, *L'art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France*, and then *L'art religieux après le concile de Trente*, which is not at all my field. He found out that the religious allegories which baroque painters used were all taken from a handbook now long forgotten. He discovered that they fit exactly the prescriptions of that handbook, and that's how he made his name in his later years. He was a very admirable person, apart from his hatred of anything German, which was much resented in the international scholarly community—that sort of thing is just not done.

SMITH: I had wanted to ask you to compare Focillon with Panofsky—their approaches and what they meant to you as thinkers.

BUCHTHAL: Well, they were very different. Focillon was mainly interested in style, and was a superb stylist himself; for Panofsky style was just something that



was there, but it was not to be made the main subject of research. Generally, the French differed from that point of view. They also did iconography, but "iconology" was something entirely new which Panofsky instigated, and that you would not have found in Paris at the time.

SMITH: Did you like Focillon's book *La vie des formes*? Was it meaningful to you?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, it was a good book, and he was a very pleasant person.

SMITH: In terms of your own work with Byzantine art, has a morphological analysis been important to you?

BUCHTHAL: No, not really. As a Byzantinist I had to go my own way. It is strange that it was Panofsky who pushed me into Byzantine art, because he did not really work in that field—not even then, though his horizon was much larger while he was still in Hamburg. He concentrated entirely on the Renaissance only when he moved to Princeton. In Germany, a full professor, an *Ordinarius*, is supposed to be able to cover the whole of art history, and so he gave medieval talks and seminars. My Ph.D. subject [later published as *The Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*], came out of one of his seminars. He had first suggested two or three Renaissance subjects which just did not appeal to me and then he fell on that subject, which had been discussed in his seminar the year before I came to Hamburg, and that immediately caught fire with me.



SMITH: What drew you to transfer from Heidelberg to Hamburg?

BUCHTHAL: Panofsky. He was the young up-and-coming star. We were still a very small group, but we belonged together. We also felt we were an elite group within Germany. [Wilhelm] Pinder, who was at the opposite end, had an enormous audience at his lectures. He lectured in the Auditorium Maximum in front of several hundred students, and was immensely popular at the time in Germany. He was the incorporation of expressionism. This has passed completely; nobody reads Pinder, though we still read Panofsky—even early Panofsky—with great enjoyment. The strange thing, as I said in my paper ["Persönliche Erinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen an sein Studium bei Panofsky in Hamburg," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 44, 1991], was that the two never met; they never saw or talked to each other. Once, during one of my Roman winters, Pinder appeared there to prepare a lecture course on early Christian art, and when he learned that I was Panofsky's pupil, he constantly sought my company—I just couldn't get rid of him. He wanted to hear about Panofsky all the time, because he was so fascinated by his personality as it came out of his books. But Panofsky was not that way. He had not much regard for Pinder. When I saw Panofsky for the last time, shortly before his death, and we went over some of the old material again, he mentioned that he had never set eyes on Pinder; they had never even met at a congress. It just was not in



Panofsky's line and he discarded it, whereas Pinder was fascinated by what Panofsky had to offer. Pinder was in no way an anti-Semite, not at all.

SMITH: But he was a Nazi.

BUCHTHAL: He was a nationalist, and so it was practically unavoidable that he would be a Nazi. I understand that toward the end of the war he gradually relinquished one position after the other of his nationalist stand and saw that he had been taken in. I'm rather sorry for him. You know, he was imprisoned after the war and died rather miserably. He was an outstanding personality, even if what he wrote is now out of date. He discovered German sculpture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was the first to put some order into its chronology.

SMITH: Had you gone to hear him lecture in Munich?

BUCHTHAL: I've never heard him lecture, no. I don't know Munich well enough, I'm sorry to say. I went there with my wife a few years ago just for three weeks to get a feel of the city because I felt I didn't know it well enough.

SMITH: Did you study at all with [Adolph] Goldschmidt?

BUCHTHAL: No, I knew Goldschmidt quite well, but I never studied with him.

SMITH: How did you come to know him?

BUCHTHAL: Well, I put this down in one of my memoirs. At the end of my first term in Hamburg, when I went in to Panofsky to say good-bye, when I was





out of the room he cried after me, "Und grüssen Sie Goldschmidt!"—Give my regards to Goldschmidt. I went back and said, "I can't do that, sir. I've never seen him and he may never have heard my name." Panofsky said, "You must know Goldschmidt, I'll see to it. Wait a few days and then ring him. He'll have a letter from me by then and he'll ask you to come and see him." This is what happened. There I also met [Kurt] Weitzmann for the first time, who was very much attached to Goldschmidt.

SMITH: You were both already working on Byzantine studies at that time?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, Goldschmidt had started very early; the corpus of medieval ivories was his life's work. Two volumes were devoted to Byzantine ivories. He did the fundamental work in that field.

SMITH: When you chose to study with Panofsky, was iconology what drew you to him?

BUCHTHAL: Well his book on the subject hadn't come out [*Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*], but he talked a great deal about it, and the difference between iconography and iconology was very clear to us, though the word was not yet in common use in Germany. I don't know whether it was his invention or somebody else's.

SMITH: I think Panofsky coined the word.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. He was no longer so fond of it in his old age. He realized



that a great deal of nonsense had been written in the name of iconology. I remember, in one of my Princeton years, he rang me one evening and said, "You know what happened to me today? I went to New York to listen to a lecture by a student from the Institute of Fine Arts, and he tried to prove that the Arnolfini portrait [Jan van Eyck, *Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride*] in the London National Gallery really stands for an annunciation. It made no sense, not even with any iconological arguments." He just thought that was funny. The backlash in America against Panofsky is now very obvious. When I was at the Institute of Fine Arts, he was the uncrowned king of art history. I was very close to him in those years. He used to come from Princeton and stay with us in New York.

SMITH: I'd like to talk with you a bit about how Panofsky organized his classes, the kinds of relationships he had with you and other students.

BUCHTHAL: Well, during my student years in Hamburg he had *Sprechstunden*—office hours—every Thursday morning, and those who belonged to his inner circle were supposed to go and see him during those office hours at least once during every term. I did that conscientiously, deliberately, and much more frequently, because if he was in a good mood he would keep you for hours and talk and talk and talk, and that would be worth more than a whole term of lectures.

SMITH: In terms of his insight?



BUCHTHAL: Yes. In addition, he asked his students quite frequently for dinner. It was just a small circle, there weren't yet many. He limited the number of his seminars to ten or twelve students. And that number was always reached but never exceeded.

SMITH: In your student discussions of the iconological method, what kinds of attitudes were there? What kind of give and take was there on the relationship of the work of art to history?

BUCHTHAL: The work of art was considered in its historical setting. Even more so with Saxl, who was my second teacher in Hamburg. I still remember my very first seminar with Saxl. The art-historical institute was then in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg—they had not yet their own building. For that seminar Saxl had an early Rembrandt picture brought down from the gallery into the seminar. It was taken out of its frame so that it could be clearly seen from all sides, and he said to us, "Have a good look at this picture." He didn't say anything else. That went on for about twenty minutes, and then he covered the Rembrandt and said, "Now you draw the composition of that picture as you remember it." The result was devastating, as you can imagine. This training of the eyes was something I got from Saxl, but not the only thing. He was really more interested in early Christian art, generally, than Panofsky, and he would spend whole evenings with me at the Warburg Institute after it had closed,



showing me books and talking about objects which I didn't know. I owe a very great deal to Saxl. He was a retiring person, and is much underrated. He died rather young, unfortunately.

SMITH: I gather the last part of his life was spent with organizational details, rather than scholarship.

BUCHTHAL: Yes and no. He really had an important role in the emigration of German scholars, and they were not only art historians. You met practically every German professor of Jewish extraction in the Warburg Institute in London in those days. Saxl tried to find jobs for them, and in most instances he was very successful. But he also continued his scholarly work, and published extensively.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you about how Panofsky and Saxl and the circle at the Bibliothek Warburg in Hamburg conceptualized their art-historical backgrounds? What, for instance, did they think about [Alois] Riegl's concept of *Kunstwollen*? How did they define that?

BUCHTHAL: You know, Saxl was very skeptical about Riegl. I don't know about Panofsky. Nowadays we are a long way away from Riegl's theories.

SMITH: It seems like with Panofsky in particular, iconology grows out of Riegl.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, we all looked up to the Vienna School, which we considered the most important art-historical center in Germany at the time. Did you ever read Gertrud Bing's memoir of Saxl, which was published as an introduction to





collected essays [*Fritz Saxl: A Volume of Memorial Essays From His Friends in England*, Edinburgh, 1957] It gives you a good idea of what he was like, especially the last sentences, which quote Saxl; I used this quote sometimes in lectures because I think it described the situation so well ["I was trained almost forty years ago in the two then outstanding European centers for the study of art history, in Vienna and Berlin. But I soon realized that my specific gifts would not make me into a real art historian who would write a biography of Raphael or Cézanne. Thus I have become a vagrant, a wanderer through the museums and libraries of Europe, at times a laborer tilling the soil on the borderline between art history, literature, science and religion; and I must confess that I have always enjoyed this life, and am still enjoying it very much." (From a lecture delivered at Royal Holloway College in March, 1948)]

Saxl was of course a student of [Max] Dvořák, and of [Julius von] Schlosser, who even before he succeeded Dvořák had seminars in the Kunsthistorische Museum in the department of sculpture, of which he was main keeper. He had objects brought into the classroom and he discussed them. I am very sorry that I never met Schlosser. I think he was the most outstanding figure of the first third of the century in German art history.

SMITH: What is it about him that you find so outstanding?

BUCHTHAL: His general cultural background. He wrote an autobiographical



study, and Ernst Gombrich has written about him. I once met [Josef] Strzygowski.

SMITH: Was it at a seminar?

BUCHTHAL: No, Saxl had given me a letter to him, which I sent, and he made me come out to his country place, not very far from Vienna. I had spent most of that summer in Istanbul—it was Saxl's idea that I should go. On the way back I stayed in Vienna for a month and tried to meet whoever was important then. I made friends with [Hans] Sedlmayr, who was a different person then from the one he later turned out to be. I went to see Strzygowski, but never Schlosser, unfortunately. I have a great veneration for Schlosser and for his work, especially the articles in the *Jahrbuch des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, which he wrote during the turn of the century, between 1890 and 1910. Absolutely outstanding, and still every word is right. Unfortunately, his switching over from the museum to the university was not such a good idea, and my contemporaries, Ernst Gombrich and Otto Kurz did not so greatly benefit from his immense knowledge and wisdom—it was really wisdom that he had.

SMITH: What about the legacy of Aby Warburg? Was there much discussion of his ideas about symbol?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, yes. I came to Hamburg when Warburg had just died, so I didn't meet him. I can't say much about him personally, but his spirit was still



very much alive. Between the building where he had lived and the new library building next door, there was a passageway, and you could go from one house to the other. The newly-erected building was even then too small and some books had to be shelved in Warburg's old residence. One constantly had to go from one place to the other; one met Mrs. Warburg and the children. One daughter still lives near Oxford.

SMITH: One of the things that contemporary people find appealing about Warburg is the tragic aspect of his thinking.

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: How did you feel about that? Was that something appealing?

BUCHTHAL: Well, I just pitied Saxl, who had to carry the burden. It was really Saxl who instituted the Warburg Institute and not Warburg. He did it while Warburg was in the psychiatric clinic in Kreuzlingen. But it all fits together.

SMITH: In what sense?

BUCHTHAL: Panofsky once said to me that if Warburg had been fond of music, he might have overcome his illness more quickly. Music didn't mean anything to him, whereas as you can see it means a lot to me. But Warburg finally managed by his own effort to get out of that depression and returned to Hamburg. He was still rather difficult to deal with, but he lectured and held



seminars. There was one lecture he gave shortly before his death, in the [Bibliotheca] Hertziana in Rome. It was an international event. Kenneth Clark, the former director of the National Gallery in London, wrote in his memoirs, "It was that lecture which changed my life." Warburg must have been enormously impressive, though he was of very small stature.

SMITH: You wrote that Saxl took you through the library and showed you some of Warburg's books with his personal annotations in them, and you were also librarian of the Warburg for a number of years.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I was.

SMITH: Was there anything specifically that you learned from looking at Warburg's books?

BUCHTHAL: Not specifically, but he annotated his own books copiously with footnotes and I still have that feeling of contact whenever I look at the older books in the institute and see his *ex libris* and occasionally his penciled notes in the margins. Of course, those books get fewer and fewer as the library grows.

SMITH: What about the relationship of your studies at Hamburg to other trends in German intellectual life? For instance, was [Max] Weber mentioned at all in your classes?

BUCHTHAL: Not in classes, no, but privately he was mentioned a great deal. He was dead by the time I studied. His brother, Alfred, occupied his chair in





Heidelberg after his death [in 1920] and I went several times to listen and just to get an impression of him, but I was not terribly impressed. I made a point during my Heidelberg and Paris years to attend as many lectures in the humanistic field as I could, to make up my mind about where I would finally settle. In the end, I made my decision in Heidelberg after a long talk with Heinrich Rickert, who was at that time a very celebrated philosopher.

SMITH: What were the particular areas of philosophy that interested you?

BUCHTHAL: Medieval philosophy.

SMITH: Scholasticism?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. To some extent I needed that for my work. It's very strange...looking back now, I just can't understand how I ever was attracted to it. It couldn't be further removed from my present interests.

SMITH: You mean the Byzantine studies kept taking you further and further away?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: We'll have to get into that. What about Georg Simmel, was he discussed at all? In terms of your class work, were his ideas ever raised?

BUCHTHAL: No, I hardly ever studied in Berlin. Simmel died in 1918. I knew some of his successors, slightly, but it never meant very much to me.

SMITH: What about [Heinrich] Dilthey?



BUCHTHAL: He died even earlier, in 1912 as far as I remember.

SMITH: But you know, the concept of the *Geisteswissenschaft* was his, and—

BUCHTHAL: At the time, I read this book [*Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften*] with great admiration. I daresay I couldn't get to the second or third page now, so little it would mean to me.

SMITH: Why would it mean so little to you?

BUCHTHAL: Just not my field of interest now.

SMITH: Okay. Did you know about [Edmund] Husserl, or [Martin] Heidegger?

BUCHTHAL: Well, I had never managed to listen to Heidegger. The lectures were overcrowded of course, even after the war. I heard a great deal about him from Rickert. He was Rickert's student for a time in Freiburg or Heidelberg, and for Rickert...well, Heidegger was the end of everything.

SMITH: The end in the sense of a disaster, or a culmination?

[Tape I, Side Two]

BUCHTHAL: Heidegger frequented a Jesuit school as a boy and that's where his ideas were formed, so that was not very highly regarded in the Protestant University of Heidelberg. Freiburg, where Heidegger had his chair, was predominantly Catholic. To the generation of Rickert and Husserl, that still meant a great deal.

SMITH: Did you know the work of Ernst Kantorowicz?



BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, and I knew him quite well in Princeton. First at Dumbarton Oaks, and then at Princeton.

SMITH: Was he an important thinker in your view?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, yes he was quite outstanding—one of the few scholars who will remain and be remembered. During his later years he turned away from [Stefan] George's teachings and wrote books which had very little to do with George.

SMITH: Did you know people in the George circles? Did that appeal to you?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I knew some of them; I knew Kurt Valentin. I knew more of them, but I don't remember their names at the moment.

SMITH: But you were not personally a follower?

BUCHTHAL: Oh no, no. I knew Melchior Lechter quite well, if that means something to you.

SMITH: No it doesn't.

BUCHTHAL: He was the painter and illustrator who illustrated the first editions of some of George's books. Have you ever seen those first editions?

SMITH: No. I'll have to take a look at them. What about discussions of philosophy in Panofsky's classes? Was Plato discussed much?

BUCHTHAL: I don't know in which direction you expect me to go.

SMITH: I'm trying to get a sense of what the intellectual interests were, the



intellectual web that Panofsky created in his seminars and in the *Sprechstunden*.

What were the kinds of ideas that were discussed?

BUCHTHAL: Well, first of all, Panofsky was extremely generous. He would not take any criticism amiss. He would objectively consider it and react accordingly, but he would not discard a student because he had said the exact opposite from what he felt. He would never do that, and that was so to the very end. Always he was generous enough to let everybody utter their opinions and then discuss them.

SMITH: So he directed you to go into the Byzantine field?

BUCHTHAL: As I say, this came out of the Panofsky seminar which was held the year before I joined the Hamburg group. When Panofsky proposed two or three Renaissance subjects as Ph.D. dissertations and I didn't like them, he said, "What about the Paris Psalter?" I immediately caught fire and had the great advantage that Saxl too was very interested and helped me a great deal. Saxl, after all, knew much more than Panofsky about early Christian and Byzantine art.

At first people would tell me it was a very wrong choice for a Ph.D. dissertation because I would never be able to see the original. The then keeper of manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale was a very difficult person who would not hand out precious manuscripts. Well, somehow I managed. It's a long story which will not interest you and which I'm not going to bring in, but one morning





he came and said, "Aujourd'hui vous verrez votre manuscrit," and I had it for a whole day. He sat next to me for the whole day and he knew that I knew that he had more important things to do, and I couldn't ask for that privilege again.

Later on, when he retired and his successor was not a Byzantine but a Carolingian scholar who didn't care about Byzantine manuscripts, I could have whatever I wanted. He was much more difficult about Carolingian manuscripts.

SMITH: What did Panofsky want you to accomplish in this study of the Paris Psalter? What was he concerned that you do?

BUCHTHAL: He was from the beginning against Weitzmann's theory, and my whole dissertation is in a way against Weitzmann. Still, from that moment until the last days, we have been very great friends. This in no way interfered in our personal relationship, but I just couldn't accept his theories. He came from a very different scholarly background. He was Goldschmidt's favorite pupil.

SMITH: Do you think there was something about Goldschmidt's methodology that led him to his theories and there was something about Panofsky's methodology that prompted you to go in the other direction?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Goldschmidt didn't care about iconology. He was also more down-to-earth in his approach.

SMITH: Very morphological.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. It so happens that last week in Freiburg my friend,



professor Otto Feld, made me talk to one of his students who worked on personifications in early Christian art, and she asked me about personifications in the Paris Psalter, and I thought it was an excellent example to state Weitzmann's and my cases. There is a picture of the fight of David and Goliath, and behind David there is a personification of virtue and behind Goliath there is a personification of vainglory. Weitzmann argued that there was no personification of vainglory in classical antiquity; it must have been invented later. My approach, which I owe to Panofsky's teaching, is that it doesn't matter at all how those personifications were called in classical antiquity; it matters that the pictorial reproduction of a fighting pair with personifications standing behind them and protecting them is indeed classical. I had good classical examples which reproduced pictorially the imagery of the fight between David and Goliath with those personifications very clearly; the fact they were called Dynamis and Alazonaia in the Paris Psalter is of no real importance. But the pictorial evidence is very strong: the tradition goes back to classical antiquity; and that applies to practically every miniature in the Paris Psalter. Weitzmann wouldn't accept it for many years, but then I hit upon an example in the first miniature where David was being inspired by a female personification called Melodia and I found a similar inspiring figure in a classical work looking exactly the same and having the same function—then Weitzmann gave in.



SMITH: So in your study of the Paris Psalter you were trying to find the ways antiquity was revived by the Byzantine artists?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. I had to fight a war on two fronts. [Charles Rufus] Morey, who really introduced medieval art to Princeton, if not to all of America, denied the existence of the Byzantine renaissance in the tenth century and he dated the Paris Psalter into the seventh century or perhaps the early eighth. He would not accept any of those theories, whereas I was quite certain that it was a tenth-century work.

Then I had my second fight against Weitzmann. He thought that the personifications were added in the tenth century and I had to prove that there was a constant continuous pictorial tradition from classical antiquity into the tenth century, and though this book which I wrote when I was very young contains a lot of nonsense, the main theories have remained and are accepted now.

SMITH: I wanted to ask you about some of the other personalities at the Bibliothek Warburg, in Hamburg. Did you know Ernst Cassirer?

BUCHTHAL: I knew him, but not terribly well. He had written the monumental book about Kant, which was in everybody's hands, and he lectured about Kant, which was mainly based on his book, and whoever knew the book well was rather bored by his lectures. He was a bit vain and had no sense of humor. Panofsky was quite close to him, but in the end they quarreled about



something, and that was again due to the lack of humor in Cassirer.

SMITH: Did the theory of symbolic form have meaning for you?

BUCHTHAL: Not very much; I'm no longer very philosophically minded.

SMITH: What about Richard Salomon?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I knew him well. I followed his classes in paleography—only Latin paleography. Unfortunately, Greek paleography was not then considered an exact science. In those days it was said that you could date a Greek manuscript in practically any century on the basis of script, and the subject was not taught. But I followed Salomon's seminars in Latin paleography and benefitted from them permanently. I can still read the most unreadable late medieval Latin manuscript on the basis of what I learned from Salomon. He also lectured on Byzantine history, and on its sources, Procopius and so on. But his main function for me was that he taught me medieval Latin paleography.

SMITH: Then there was Hans Liebeschütz.

BUCHTHAL: Liebeschütz. Oh, he was a favorite of mine. He was a high school teacher and his students must have loved him. He was the most lovable person you could imagine—terribly naive. He was so naive that his pupils in the school would not make use of it. He was a great scholar, very retiring, never putting himself in the forefront...a very lovable person.

SMITH: Was he one of your teachers?





BUCHTHAL: Yes, I took his classes in medieval Latin and he was also one of my examiners. As you probably know, in Germany you have to choose two subsidiary subjects in addition to the main one, which in my case was art history. Panofsky insisted that all students of his inner circle with whom he was in personal contact take classical archaeology as the main subsidiary subject. I didn't like it at the time, but I took it anyway, and I'm infinitely grateful that I did. I really couldn't have managed without what I learned in classical archaeology. As a second subject I chose medieval Latin, and Liebeschütz examined me. He gave me some pages from the Libri Carolini and asked me to translate and interpret them. That was not asking too much and I was very happy about it.

SMITH: Who was your examiner in classical archaeology?

BUCHTHAL: Eugen von Mercklin was the classical archaeologist. At the same time, he was the keeper of the classical department of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, the art industrial museum. He was the only one of my teachers who stayed on all through the Nazi period and he lived to a very ripe old age. He only died in the seventies, I think. He was an uninspiring but thorough teacher, and we learned a lot from him.

SMITH: Why is classical archaeology so important for Byzantine studies?

BUCHTHAL: Well, classical archaeology is the basis of all Byzantine studies.



There are frontiers which are not strictly defined and one overflows into the other.

SMITH: How so? I'm not sure what you mean by that. They flow into each other in terms of the disciplines?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, and in terms of method. There are subjects which can just as well be dealt with by a classical archaeologist as by a medieval scholar. Late Roman archaeology, for instance, is a fair subject also for art history. There is really no definite frontier between late antique and early Christian art. But von Mercklin was not a member of the Warburg circle. He had his own archaeological library in his office in the museum and did not come to the Bibliothek Warburg. It was not at all in his line. He was the only gentile among my teachers, and I understand that later on he converted to Nazism. But I can't complain, he treated me very fairly.

SMITH: Can you remember any of the details of your oral examination by Panofsky?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. I think I even wrote a few down, in that paper which I mentioned before. At that time a book had appeared in French trying to prove that Rogier van der Weyden and the Master of Flémalle were one and the same person, which Panofsky didn't believe, and in order to make his point he brought the enormous volume of plates of that book, put it on the table, and let me say of



every illustration whether it was a detail from a picture by Rogier van der Weyden or from the Master of Flémalle. This took fifty minutes of the one hour.

SMITH: Fifty minutes?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, and I think I did quite well. Then he asked a few questions where I did not do so well, about Michelangelo's drawings, and about another Flemish painter of the fifteenth century. When I didn't immediately recognize that second-rate picture by a second-rate artist, he didn't take well to it.

SMITH: Was that typical for him?

BUCHTHAL: No, no. But I think that was the point where I gambled away my *summa cum laude*, which I might otherwise have obtained. There was only one student in Panofsky's whole career in Germany who had obtained *summa cum laude*, and it was not in my time. [Adolf] Katzenellenbogen, who was my costudent, and myself just got *magna cum laude*. Panofsky didn't make things easy for me in that examination. Due to the political situation in July, 1933, it was held in his own private apartment, and I then carried the files to the university—a very unusual procedure. But he had refused to enter the university again under any pretext, and he wasn't present at the faculty meeting where I was proclaimed Ph.D., the day after the oral examination.

SMITH: He had already been dismissed from his position?

BUCHTHAL: Well, not really dismissed. He was still a member of the teaching



staff, but he was *beurlaubt*; he was not supposed to lecture. He was not dismissed, otherwise he couldn't have seen Katzenellenbogen and me and Walter Horn through our examinations. He was dismissed very soon afterwards.

SMITH: In the 1920s, what were your personal tastes in music and theater and art? Did you like the contemporary, experimental work?

BUCHTHAL: Well, it has to be said against Panofsky that he never mentioned modern art, did not teach us to study modern art or to approach it with the right eyes. That applies to practically every German university at the time. It may have been different in Marburg, where Richard Hamann had a very open mind and probably taught contemporary art, but in most established universities this was not the case.

SMITH: But in terms of your own interests, did you go to contemporary art galleries?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. We had the Kronprinzen Palais in Berlin, which contained the modern collections. They are now in the west of Berlin, in the National Gallery opposite the state library—very close to the Philharmonic.

SMITH: Oh, right. Did you like [Arnold] Schoenberg?

BUCHTHAL: Well, the early Schoenberg, yes. I am very fond of *Verklärte Nacht*. *Moses und Aaron* I have never heard, I must say. I respect Schoenberg, certainly, but his work doesn't mean very much to me.





SMITH: So were your tastes more traditional than modern?

BUCHTHAL: My wife is the sister of a very well-known pianist [Rudolf Serkin], who died two years ago in America. He stood very much in the forefront in America and he literally dominated our twelve years in New York. He was a purist; it was Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, perhaps Schumann, and Brahms, whom I do not like and always avoid whenever I can. We hardly ever were exposed to modern music. He once played a Bartók concerto, but this was very extraordinary for him.

SMITH: Well, I'd like to move on to your involvement in Byzantine studies. I wanted to begin by asking you about the state of the field when you entered it in the late 1920s. Who were the major figures?

BUCHTHAL: Well, we have made enormous progress since then, not only in paleography, but so many new monuments have become known. I went to Istanbul for the first time in 1932 on Saxl's urging. Saxl really dominated my education.

SMITH: Even more so than Panofsky?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, especially as it continued here in London. I was a protégé of Saxl and he always gave me the right direction.

SMITH: Was he familiar with Byzantine studies?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, very much so. More than Panofsky.



SMITH: You had mentioned early Christian, which it overlaps of course.

BUCHTHAL: Saxl also published in the early Christian field when he was younger.

SMITH: Who were the sources that you could turn to to get a conception of Byzantine society and culture at that time?

BUCHTHAL: There was not very much, really.

SMITH: Kurt Weitzmann told me that he felt as if he and you and Otto Demus were creating a field from scratch.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, Otto Demus was one of the outstanding figures in the field. He was a great friend.

SMITH: What was the relationship of Byzantine studies to classical Greek and to Hellenistic studies?

BUCHTHAL: The classicists usually push Byzantine studies aside; they don't want to hear about it. Byzantinists of course realize, as I did, that you have to have a good classical education in order to deal competently with Byzantine art. After all, it grew out of classical art and there was a continuity in the east. The east was not completely upset by the migration of nations; this only happened in the west. There was a complete break between western early Christian art and western Visigothic or Carolingian. Whenever there were similarities, these were kind of renaissances, but in Constantinople this went through without a break, or



only very little break, with iconoclasm, which is still not considered to be such a definite break and to have only engulfed Constantinople itself and the environment. Whereas art according to the old way went on in the provinces. It certainly did. Some of our most outstanding works were done during iconoclasm. For instance, it is said that the mosaicists who set the mosaics in the Great Mosque in Damascus were called from Constantinople, and this was the seventh, early eighth century.

SMITH: You said earlier that you had defined your own way in Byzantine studies. I wonder how applicable was what you had learned from Panofsky and others about Western European medieval and Renaissance art to Byzantine art?

BUCHTHAL: The method was always significant. Panofsky lectured during my student years on Caravaggio and on French seventeenth- and eighteenth-century painting—Watteau was one of his favorite subjects. The approach was always the same; he was interested in different things from those in which Pinder would have been interested. The detractors from Panofsky usually say, "He opened our eyes for iconological problems but not for style. He didn't teach his pupils how to see." This was not true—he did teach us to see. This was very commonplace to say in Germany, that you never learned to see things through Panofsky; it was a purely intellectual activity, which is not true.

SMITH: What about the relationship of working with originals versus working



with photographs? The purists would say you can only work with the originals, that to work with photographs is a waste of time. How do you feel about that?

BUCHTHAL: I feel that photography has made such enormous progress. Color photography can now really almost replace the original, but when I studied there was no color photography. There is a story of Panofsky working on the facade of St. Gilles in southern France. He had a big set of good photographs, black and white of course, which he sorted and rearranged and worked with for weeks. Then he went to St. Gilles and found there was no comparison between the photographs and the original. He finally abandoned the attempt to utilize the photographs with the words, "die verdammten Originale." The original was quite different from the photographs, and one couldn't really use them.

SMITH: Before you did your oral examinations, you spent some time in Paris working with Gabriel Millet?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: What did you learn from him?

BUCHTHAL: Mainly personal modesty; next, Byzantine iconography. He said style was of no importance; it was an accidental factor of which one need not take any notice. He based his whole theory on iconography. His enormous book [*Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont-Athos*], is still





outstanding, but it has to be used with a certain caution, because he completely discards style; it doesn't mean anything to him. He was a very nice person, very retiring, very modest; not at all a strong personality like his successor.

SMITH: And that was?

BUCHTHAL: André Grabar, the father of Oleg Grabar. A first-rate scholar, and a very persuasive lecturer.

SMITH: You mentioned that so many new monuments exist now in the Byzantine field. What is the relationship of Byzantine art history to Byzantine archaeology? Has it been a cooperative relationship?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, unless you see archaeology in a very strictly limited way, just connected with stones. Certainly the build-up of a Byzantine church is art history. The program of defining the various subjects to be represented and the places where they are to be found is art history, and there archaeology and art history overlap. When I use the word *archaeology*, I usually say *classical archaeology* to avoid misunderstandings.

SMITH: But there are Byzantine archaeological projects?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. There are also medieval archaeologists who are mostly concerned with the setting of stones.

SMITH: Was the Gennadion useful in terms of your work?

BUCHTHAL: It has a very good library—perhaps almost the best of its kind in



Athens. The library in the German Archaeological Institute is quite good, but the one in the British School is not so good, nor is the one in the American School. So the Gennadion has a definite purpose in Athens, even though it is not a first-rate Byzantine library.

SMITH: As you were working, did you have an awareness of what was being done in the U.K. and the U.S. in the Byzantine field?

BUCHTHAL: Before I emigrated?

SMITH: Yes, before you emigrated.

BUCHTHAL: No, I wasn't so sure that Byzantine would be my field; I didn't know very much. I attended lectures, which were not too good, in Berlin at that time. It wasn't very widely taught. Now you have chairs for Byzantine art at several German universities but that hardly occurred before the last war.

SMITH: In '36, '37 you studied in Beirut at the American University. What was the purpose of your going there?

BUCHTHAL: It was again Saxl's idea. He perhaps thought that I might in the end fall in with Islamic art instead of Byzantine. He had the good luck and the sense to use an opportunity which offered itself when one professor of the American University in Beirut was in London, and he brought us together; this man arranged for me to stay in Beirut for a whole academic year. Then I made friends and went back the next academic year to see them. This was a wonderful



time; it was sheer paradise on earth. It will never come again, not in Beirut in any case. I went back to Beirut some twenty years ago to show my wife the place and it was very sad how it had changed. This was shortly before the serious troubles started. Before the war, Syria and Lebanon were mainly governed from Beirut; there was a very superficial control at the frontier, you could freely pass from one country to the other. The new government museum in Damascus had just been opened. I knew the old one as well, which was later closed down. Then there was the monumental building of the Musée national libanais in Beirut, which was bombed to pieces during the recent troubles. I have a good informant because one of my students is the daughter of the professor who was the main surgeon at the American University Hospital when I was there before the war. I knew the daughter when she was a toddler, and now she is a very devoted student. She tried to go on living in Beirut until it turned out to be really impossible.

SMITH: When you were in Beirut, your primary interest was Islamic art, or were you also looking at Byzantine?

BUCHTHAL: I was looking at whatever Byzantine monuments there were.

There were very imposing remains of classical antiquity: Baalbek, in Lebanon, and Palmyra in Syria. Aleppo is a marvelous town, or was in those days. I don't know how much of the old town has now been destroyed. I wish I had had



more time there and had given more time to sightseeing rather than learning Arabic, but in the end I could follow courses and lectures in Arabic.

SMITH: Getting back to Panofsky for a moment. What was his understanding of Byzantine art and society? You said he didn't know much, but he did write about it from time to time. For instance, in his essay on human proportions ["The History of the Theory of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles"], one of the sections is on Byzantine art. Do you know that article?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, yes.

SMITH: How accurate was his characterization of Byzantine perspective in that article?

BUCHTHAL: Well, it is somehow antiquated now, and he wouldn't stand for it. He has never made a point of considering his own work to stand for all time; he was always open to criticism. He wrote a few bad articles and he openly admitted that he was at fault.

SMITH: I want to come back to the field of Byzantine studies, but I thought I'd go back to the question of your leaving Germany—your emigration, or the exile, as some people think of it.

BUCHTHAL: My parents lived in Berlin, but I studied in Hamburg and that went comparatively without a hitch. Hamburg was never very Nazi.





[Tape II, Side One]

SMITH: You were saying that Hamburg was more liberal.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, it was liberal because of the maritime trade. It always looked outward towards foreign countries and was not so engulfed as the centers in the middle of Germany. The atmosphere in Hamburg was always more liberal and more congenial. The contact with foreigners was much closer. It was much easier in Hamburg.

SMITH: Were you surprised by the Nazis taking over Germany? Did that come as a shock to you?

BUCHTHAL: I was surprised because in Hamburg the problem hardly existed. My sister, who studied in Munich, said all the time, "Don't be misled, Hitler is going to succeed." Munich was particularly bad of course, as you probably know, but in Hamburg you hardly noticed it. For instance, there was a very well-to-do girl, very well dressed, a student, who always carried the party badge. She attended all Panofsky's, Saxl's, Liebeschütz's and Salomon's lectures, but before she went into the lecture room she always took the party badge off; it was just not done.

SMITH: One thing that one reads about the Weimar period is that many university professors were opposed to the Weimar Republic. Did you encounter this at Heidelberg?



BUCHTHAL: Heidelberg played a very deplorable role in the takeover by the Nazis. I think Leipzig stood out next to Hamburg, but I'm not well enough informed.

SMITH: Did you know people who became Nazis?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes.

SMITH: People that you liked?

BUCHTHAL: Gertrud Bing, who was Warburg's assistant for many years and edited two volumes of his writings, had an assistant with whom she also traveled in Italy after Warburg's death to put those volumes together. He was a close friend, worked at the Warburg Institute and so on, and every week we had an evening of chamber music. We were great friends, and then suddenly in May 1933, he came forward and said, "I'm sorry, I cannot stand apart from this movement." I never saw him again. There were many like that.

SMITH: Would you say he was a Nazi but not an anti-Semite? Or he was a nationalist?

BUCHTHAL: He was a nationalist. He certainly wasn't an anti-Semite.

SMITH: Does the period of the Nazi takeover have special meaning for you? Have you reflected on why the Nazis took over?

BUCHTHAL: Well, this you can't answer with one point. One factor was certainly the treaty of Versailles and the humiliation of giving West Prussia to



Poland with East Prussia remaining German. Whenever you traveled to East Prussia you had to travel through Poland, and these things were taken very much to heart by nationalists. Others, like the *Mittelstand*...how would you say it in English?

SMITH: The middle class.

BUCHTHAL: The middle class was impoverished through inflation; that was a very important factor.

SMITH: Did you consider yourself a nationalist at all?

BUCHTHAL: No. It's very strange thinking back to those days when I considered myself German—not a nationalist, but a real German, according to my upbringing at school and so on. Looking back, it is quite obvious that at school they tried to educate us in military matters. There was one afternoon set aside for military games. I could escape because there was a clause that said whoever wanted to have rowing lessons on the Havel instead could do that, and three or four of us did that and escaped. You know, Berlin is surrounded by those magnificent lakes, and I rowed there once every week. It's still very attractive. I was there only a few weeks ago and loved it.

SMITH: Berlin is a beautiful city.

BUCHTHAL: Well, not the city, no, the city is not that beautiful. North of the Alps there is one beautiful city and that is Prague. Next to Prague comes



Krakow, and then, at a certain distance, Vienna. There are also some beautiful towns in Germany, but I wouldn't rank Berlin among them. Architecturally it's a rather dull and prosaic town. But there are lovely buildings and woods and surroundings, and the cultural life then was on a very high standard.

SMITH: Reading in German art history of the 1920s, one of the things that struck me was the number of articles that were trying to identify national styles. Over and over again, what was the difference between German and Austrian art, what was the difference between German and Italian art. It seemed to be a very important issue that every country could be identified by its national style.

BUCHTHAL: The idea really goes back to [Heinrich] Wölfflin's writings from the turn of the century, and it was at that time offered to explain fundamental differences between German and Italian art; and Wölfflin stuck to his guns to the very last. At that time and in that context, the difference made sense and led its author to further important conclusions. But it does not make sense if the argument is not carried further. Wölfflin's ideas were not intended to encourage nationalism, but they have often been used in that way by his successors. Still, certain national characteristics are more or less constant. English cathedrals, which mostly look like fortresses, are easily recognizable as such and could not be confounded with any other medieval building.

SMITH: In January '33, when Hitler took over, what was the situation? When





did you decide you would leave Germany?

BUCHTHAL: I decided in 1933, as so many people did, but for some it was difficult to get away. I was rather lucky. My parents followed in 1938.

SMITH: They spent much longer then?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. My father had a business to look after and said he just wouldn't leave until everything was perfectly straight. He stayed on until '38, under terrible humiliations, but he managed to get out. So did my mother.

SMITH: Did they get out before or after *Kristallnacht*?

BUCHTHAL: Before. *Kristallnacht* was November '38 and he got out in March.

SMITH: When did your sister leave?

BUCHTHAL: Before that. My sister stayed in Italy for some years doing orthopaedic work in hospitals, but then the atmosphere in Italy too became quite unpleasant so she came over here.

SMITH: To England?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: What was the reason for your deciding to come to England, as opposed to the United States or Palestine or France?

BUCHTHAL: Well, Palestine, then even more than now is a country I love to visit but where I would not like to live. More than in those days the language



now is a barrier. I don't speak modern Hebrew and the whole atmosphere does not appeal to me—that nationalistic trend. But it's a very beautiful country.

SMITH: When the Warburg Institute sort of moved all at once, was it discussed that you would go with them?

BUCHTHAL: More or less, yes. I was the first visitor not being strictly a member of the staff who turned up in London.

SMITH: How did you survive when you came here?

BUCHTHAL: Well, we had no working permits, we were not supposed to work, and Saxl somehow managed to keep us just above water. It was not always easy, not for him and not for us, but he put a tremendous effort in it.

SMITH: Could you get money from your parents?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, some.

SMITH: Were those financially difficult days for you when you came to England?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. It worked quite well at the beginning, but then later on it became impossible.

SMITH: In what way?

BUCHTHAL: First there was no more money available in Germany, and then if there was money, you couldn't send it out. I think in the end you were allowed to take ten marks out of Germany, and if you were unlucky there would be a



very thorough search of your body to see whether you had more money on you.

SMITH: Was your wife also from Berlin?

BUCHTHAL: No, she grew up in Vienna.

SMITH: Did she emigrate to England after the *Anschluss*?

BUCHTHAL: No, before that. She worked for the Swiss railways in Switzerland for a while, making puppets for their advertisements. Then the Swiss authorities became unpleasant and said she couldn't stay forever, and she had no chance of getting a work permit. Finally the director of the Swiss railways said, "Why don't you go to England, do the work for us there, and send it over?" And that's what she did. She knew the Gombrichs from her childhood days—we met through the Gombrichs.

SMITH: What about your personal interaction with Britons after you came to London? Did you begin to meet many English people?

BUCHTHAL: Not many, but some, especially in the British Museum and through the British Museum, at the Warburg Institute. Francis Wormald was a very close friend who really adopted me and helped me a great deal.

SMITH: He was a paleographer, is that right?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. First he worked at the manuscripts department of the British Museum, then he switched over, when the chair was instituted, to the Institute of Historical Research of London University. Roger Hinks was a close friend of



Wormald's. He too was one of the earliest friends of the Warburg Institute in London.

SMITH: Then did the Warburg try to become part of English intellectual life?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, but this only succeeded much later, when Gombrich was director. Before that...well, we were too strange and too different. It was Gombrich who succeeded in amalgamating the institute into British scholarly life.

SMITH: Could you compare the German and the British approaches to art history when you came here?

BUCHTHAL: They are so different that I would welcome more specific, more detailed questions.

SMITH: Was there a difference in the public for art history in Germany and in England?

BUCHTHAL: Well, the class system is much more pronounced in England. There has been a great deal about it in the papers during the last few weeks.

SMITH: How did that influence the work of art historians?

BUCHTHAL: Well, you always had to have some money to study art history in Germany as well as here. In Germany it was even more important because as a *Privatdozent*, as a young lecturer, you didn't get any salary, whereas here, once you are a lecturer you are in, and you do get some remuneration. In Germany it's very difficult and was mainly reduced to wealthy classes, not, as here, to





aristocratic classes.

SMITH: Did you have people here who were interested in your work and would help support it financially?

BUCHTHAL: No. The subject didn't exist when I came here. The Courtauld Institute had just been founded as the first art history institute in this country; when people asked you, "What is your job?" and I said, "I am an art historian," there would first be blank faces, and then they would say, "Oh, you paint, or you sculpt?" The idea of research in art was entirely new to them; it didn't exist. There was no chair and no lectureship in art history in this country. The Courtauld Institute did not have a very good start.

SMITH: Did you know Mr. [Samuel] Courtauld?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, slightly. He was an admirable person, who never was in the foreground; he managed it all from his own office and mostly anonymously. I admired him very much.

SMITH: You arrived here and Fritz Saxl was your mentor at this point. What did he tell you that you should do?

BUCHTHAL: He advised me to go on working on the subject of my Ph.D. dissertation and bring it out as a book, which I did.

SMITH: Did you think you would be able to get a teaching job at a British university?



BUCHTHAL: I didn't think about that. I did not adhere to the theory that many people in those days did that the Nazi regime would not be permanent. When there were those various shakeups in 1934 or '35, many people thought, "That's the end of it." I must say, I don't think I considered the possibility of a permanent job, I just wanted to bring that book out and then wait and see. Now I don't understand why I never considered moving to the United States, where life would have been much easier before the war.

SMITH: It would have been easier for you to get a position, a teaching position?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: Did you know anybody in the United States other than Panofsky?

BUCHTHAL: Not really, but my wife had many relatives in the United States. Arturo Toscanini, as it happened, was ready to vouch for us.

SMITH: Was it the Warburg that kept you here in London?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I felt I belonged to that institute from Hamburg days.

SMITH: One person we haven't mentioned yet is Edgar Wind, and he also was an important influence on you.

BUCHTHAL: No. I knew him for many years, but I didn't know him well. I admired him, but personally I didn't particularly care for him.

SMITH: Gertrud Bing you knew well?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, very well indeed. She was a great friend to both of us.



SMITH: Was Saxl the one who hired you as the Warburg librarian?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, but [Hans] Meier was the first librarian.

SMITH: Did Saxl hire you when Meier died?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Before the war I had no work permit and had no chance of getting one, so whenever Meier was on holiday I replaced him on a temporary basis, and then later on this became more or less the usual thing, that I worked together with Meier. When Meier was killed it was generally understood that I would succeed him; there was no doubt about it, but that was during the war when there was no difficulty about working permits.

SMITH: You supervised the removal of the books to Denham?

BUCHTHAL: No. The library books were not in Denham; they were in three different places in the country: in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth; in the Watts Gallery in Compton, in Surrey, not very far from Guildford; and the third deposit was in the private house of Sir Percival David, also in the country. I had to travel constantly between those three places to see that everything was all right. We went on buying new books as far as that was possible—only English and American books could be bought at that time, of course, but we tried to keep up a certain standard of normality. It wasn't quite easy.

SMITH: You were an "enemy alien," legally, were you not? So were there restrictions on your movement?



BUCHTHAL: Yes. I even was interned for a few months. At some point it was decided that all male enemy aliens should be interned. But women didn't spy, or so the government thought—they needn't be interned—and among the men, only those with German and Austrian passports spied. Those from the Sudetenland, many of whom were real Nazis, had Czech passports and were allies. It was quite grotesque, like so many other things in that war—very badly handled. Then the British Academy took a hand in it and sorted out those who should come out, and I was out within two or three months. Looking back, I must say it was quite an exhilarating experience. The incompetence can't be described, it was so bad. The lack of organizational talent is the usual trouble in this country. They are marvelous in an emergency, but otherwise they just let things go.





SESSION TWO: 31 AUGUST, 1993

[Tape III, Side One]

BUCHTHAL: You asked me yesterday whether Byzantine art fits in well with other cultural and intellectual manifestations in Byzantium, and the answer at which I finally arrived is it doesn't really; it's a field for itself. You'll also mostly find that art historians are not specialists in Byzantine philology or philosophy or whatever it is. Manuscript illumination, which was my special subject, covers a very small range of comparable activities in Western Europe. It is almost entirely a religious art. There are very few illustrated manuscripts which do not contain biblical or liturgical texts. It may also be a question of what survived. During the sack of Constantinople they must have seen to it that the biblical manuscripts were saved first. There are one or two historical chronicles and astronomical manuscripts and so on, and, with very few exceptions, they are not really outstanding. It's practically exclusively a religious art, and that distinguishes it from the rest. After all, the Byzantines were masters in many fields. In law, for instance, and in science they handed on the heritage of their Greek forebears, which the Arabs later adopted and handed down to us in the twelfth century in Spain.

SMITH: But they didn't express those elements of their society through visual means?



BUCHTHAL: No, the visual repertoire is limited to very few subjects. Of course they illustrated the Bible, and I think at least half the surviving manuscripts are books of the four gospels. Evangelists' portraits are absolutely dominant. There are some gospels with scenic illustrations, but not many. The main thing is really the evangelists' portraits. You could almost write the history of Byzantine painting by relying entirely on evangelists' portraits.

SMITH: I'm still not clear. Did you select the Paris Psalter as your dissertation topic, or did Panofsky propose it to you?

BUCHTHAL: Well, it was half and half. As I said yesterday, Panofsky conducted a seminar on Byzantine art and this was one of his subjects. As the controversies about it were very violent and were still going on in his time and are practically going on until now, this seemed to be a promising subject.

SMITH: What was particularly appropriate about the Paris Psalter that made it appealing to you as a topic? What were the options that you had?

BUCHTHAL: It is a unique manuscript, in a way. The miniatures do not belong; they were taken over from some other manuscript. We don't know what it was except that it must also have been a psalter because of the subject matter. In a way, it doesn't fit in anywhere. That's why there has been this controversy—was it a seventh- or tenth-century work? Where did it come from? These are unique problems.



SMITH: When you revised it for publication, what sorts of changes did you make?

BUCHTHAL: I just elaborated on the original text. There were no changes and I never changed my opinion.

SMITH: So you felt you had resolved the question satisfactorily?

BUCHTHAL: More or less, yes...rather less. Every generation looks at these outstanding problems from a different point of view.

SMITH: Right. Then you worked somewhat in Islamic art, but what was the impetus for you moving from a Byzantine subject into Islamic art?

BUCHTHAL: There was a period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when the Mohammedans liked to illustrate their nonreligious luxury manuscripts with figural scenes, especially in Mesopotamia—present day Iraq—and in Persia.

Some of the great masterpieces of book illumination were done in Persia. So I thought I'd learn Arabic and then switch over or combine the two, but it didn't work out that way. I really went back full time to Byzantine.

SMITH: Now, was the Psalter of Queen Melisende your next major project?

BUCHTHAL: Well, that's a different world altogether. This manuscript was on view in the British Museum in the exhibition halls before the war. During the war of course all the manuscripts were evacuated and I thought all the time, "When the manuscripts come back I will write a monograph on Queen



Melisende's Psalter." Then when it did come back I started studying and the subject grew out of all proportions. I discovered that there were about twenty manuscripts from the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, not only this one, on which people had concentrated before. Its provenance was never quite certain. I remember showing my photographs to the great Pietro Toesca, who was the leading Italian art historian at the time in Rome and he said, "Don't tell me anything, all this is Venetian art." Well, later on when I sent him the book, he was very complimentary, and, I must say, there was very little wrong with that book. It really stands up to scrutiny.

SMITH: Now that again was a field where you were pioneering.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. I really inaugurated that wave, which is now so widespread that people go to Mount Sinai to look at icons. I did that too, I spent two weeks at the Sinai monastery, to study icons and manuscripts. They do have a good manuscript library.

SMITH: Is that where the St. Catherine's mosaics are?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: Have you considered the relationship of the manuscripts and the mosaic art?

BUCHTHAL: A little, but perhaps not enough. Several attempts have been made during the last few years to connect the two, but I find them all





unsatisfactory. This must have been a mixture of various elements. It's very difficult for us to imagine exactly the aspect of the various people living more or less peacefully together in the Holy Land. There are Syriac and even Hebrew elements which occasionally stand out as very important. Then it is interesting to observe how the origin of that movement started in France and then shifted to Italy, where it is possible to draw historical parallels. In the end there was just one city left, Akko—St. Jean D'Acre—in the north of present-day Israel, where this art was carried on, until Akko too was swallowed by the Egyptians. The Knights of the Holy Sepulchre left Palestine altogether, first went to Cyprus, then to Rhodes, then further west, and they were always chased away, so not much of that is left.

SMITH: You also did your work on Gandharan art. What was it in particular that appealed to you about that subject?

BUCHTHAL: I did that during the war when it was not possible to get at originals here in London, and Saxl had acquired several hundred photographs of Gandharan sculpture in Pakistani museums—Indian museums as it was then—and he gave me the task to put them in some order, assign them their correct dates, their provenances and their artistic sources, which I did, and I still think that my theories stand. It is now pretty well accepted, not everywhere, but mostly, that much of it is not Greek Hellenistic art but Roman art, typically provincial Roman



art.

SMITH: I found your arguments quite convincing.

BUCHTHAL: Thank you.

SMITH: Not that I'm an expert, but on a logical basis it seemed quite convincing to me. But I'm wondering how one in a purely art-historical sense judges the validity of [Alfred] Foucher's argument versus yours, because in some senses both arguments have to rely on assumptions.

BUCHTHAL: I once had a long talk with Foucher, who was then a nonagenarian. It was very interesting, but it showed me that what I was lacking was the philological basis. I didn't know any of the languages spoken at that time in that part of India, especially not Karoshti, and that was really the main reason that I left the field. I felt one has to know the language of the civilization on which one works.

SMITH: But do the documents show either a Roman or Hellenistic Greek influence?

BUCHTHAL: No, the artists are again rather isolated and not very much connected with all around civilization in those countries. But I felt too ill-equipped to produce a major work on it.

SMITH: One of the exciting things about that essay is the sweep of it and the way you argue for the parallels between the development of Buddhist and



Christian iconography, but at the same time, did you have any trepidations about where you were going?

BUCHTHAL: No, but there you have a typical example of the Warburg Institute mentality, that these parallels mattered, and that I would look around not just to Old and New Testament illustrations but also to Indian illustrations and give it its place in the art of late antiquity; that's where it belongs.

SMITH: I guess an underlying assumption of the Warburg method is the pervasive power of Greek and Roman antiquity.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. I dare say Aby Warburg, who died before I joined the Warburg Institute, would have been pleased with that approach.

SMITH: How do you explain this apparent power of Greco-Roman antiquity to keep renewing itself?

BUCHTHAL: Well, that really starts with Alexander the Great's conquests. That's when the Greeks first had a certain foothold in those parts and there are certain works which reflect third-, second-century B.C. Greek art. But then when it becomes a fully-grown art with its own cycle of narrative miniatures, or sculptures in this case, that cannot be explained just out of the Greek background; it is the Roman foothold. There are many examples to prove that. For instance, Foucher's successors found a whole Roman antiquities shop in Gandhara full with genuine Roman sculpture, which must have been for sale. It was really a second-



hand shop, and it was published as such by Otto Kurz, who was my contemporary at the Warburg Institute.

SMITH: Yes, but that discovery took place after you had written your study, is that correct?

BUCHTHAL: No, it went parallel. Maybe his contribution was held up because it was a joint publication with the Musée Guimet in Paris, and it may have taken some more years to bring that publication out, but we were roughly contemporary and we worked a great deal together.

SMITH: In the Warburg culture, were you as a group always bouncing ideas off each other and discussing the possibilities, such as this Gandhara study?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, yes.

SMITH: But it sounds as if in some ways Saxl was the one who said Gandhara was important.

BUCHTHAL: He was the guiding spirit, yes. Just before the war, he had managed to get hundreds of photographs of Gandharan sculptures from Pakistani museums through the good offices of Stella Kramrisch, who later on taught in Philadelphia and at the Institute of Fine Arts. She was stranded here on her way back to America in 1940 and for a time she worked at the Warburg and left those photographs in Saxl's care. Then, late in '40, or early in '41, Saxl asked me to take this over and see what I could make of it. First I had to put them all in





order—they were an unwieldy lot—and then I published several articles. Saxl was extremely sensitive to what happened around him. When he noticed that my work was flagging for some reason, he always managed to get me up again by securing a very well respected lecture for me to get me back on my feet.

SMITH: Did you have staff seminars on a regular basis?

BUCHTHAL: After the war, yes. Mainly with the Courtauld Institute students. The two institutes worked together very closely.

SMITH: But were there faculty seminars where just you, Kurz, Gombrich, and the others on the faculty met?

BUCHTHAL: No. It would develop into that later on, but these were the first steps of the Courtauld and the Warburg. The first director of the Courtauld was not very sympathetic to collaboration. The second director was more sympathetic, but was rather a shadowy figure. The Courtauld Institute really came into its own under Anthony Blunt.

SMITH: Did you know him?

BUCHTHAL: I knew him very well indeed. He also came to this house, and I was very fond of him. I feel one has to protect him against exaggerated claims. But I do not know the inside story. It appears that he overstepped his mission.

SMITH: Did you know that he was a communist or a socialist?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, everybody knew that; he never made any secret of it.



SMITH: Did you know he was a homosexual?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, you just had to look at him, but it was not intrusive, it was not repelling as it was with so many others. I am sorry for the whole thing; it needn't have ended as it did. I met him only once after those revelations had become public and found him just as pleasant and communicative as before. I must say I was fond of him. He, as many other homosexuals, was highly educated and sensitive and sophisticated. He may not have been the ideal director at the Courtauld, but I don't think his inclination kept him away from any necessary steps.

SMITH: What do you mean, he might not have been the ideal director? In what sense?

BUCHTHAL: Well, he occasionally had other things on his mind. Those faculty meetings were sometimes very revealing when he tried to concentrate and found it very difficult. But, as I say, he was a pleasant person and I wouldn't hesitate to say that he was a decent person, in spite of everything.

SMITH: Did you ever discuss with him doing a book for the series that he and Rudolf Wittkower edited for Desmond Zwemmer?

BUCHTHAL: No.

SMITH: Was that in part because Byzantine art did not capture their interest?

BUCHTHAL: Well, there was one lecturer at the Courtauld Institute who later



on got a chair in Edinburgh. His specialty was Byzantine art, but he was not really terribly competent. He didn't know much Greek and he belonged to the old generation. This is a country of dilettantes, as you probably know, and he was one of them.

SMITH: The antiquarians?

BUCHTHAL: No, the whole country, in many aspects of public life. They are all dilettantes.

SMITH: What about writing for the Sunday papers or the cultural magazines, did you consider doing that?

BUCHTHAL: I never did, no. The subject was too out of the way of the general line of interest. Gombrich did it a great deal, but he mostly worked on the Renaissance and he had something to offer which most people would understand, but my field was too limited.

SMITH: How big was the community of scholars that you corresponded with in the Byzantine field? What was that circle like?

BUCHTHAL: In my younger years the old generation was still alive and I had many contacts in Paris, also in Rome. Then there was the grand old man of our subject, Viktor Lazarev, in Moscow. I had corresponded with him for years before I first got to Moscow, and he received me with great respect. We went on corresponding and exchanging publications. I have all his books upstairs, and



he has my books. Several times, when I visited the Soviet Union afterwards, younger people in the museums told me they had seen all my books because Lazarev's library had been made a public institution. He had all the books I wrote, which I sent him, and they were probably the only copies in the Soviet Union at the time. His students all knew them—they were all *au courant*.

SMITH: Were there differences of opinion that had to do with the national traditions that people were working in?

BUCHTHAL: No. The Russians considered themselves the third Rome, as you know, and their Byzantium has its fixed place. I wonder how they look at it now. I've had very little contact during the last few years—just with younger scholars for whom I've tried to find jobs or scholarships here, which is rather difficult because the present situation here is not favorable.

SMITH: How much travel in the field did you do?

BUCHTHAL: I traveled a great deal, and my position in New York allowed me to do that—I could afford it.

SMITH: That of course was much later in your career.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, well, before that I had that time in Beirut, which I mentioned yesterday, and I went to Istanbul on Saxl's instigation. It was Saxl who really shaped my career, more than Panofsky, who was not that much interested in those early subjects.





SMITH: Yesterday, when I asked you how applicable the Panofsky method was, you said something to the effect that you had to find your own way, and I'm wondering, both theoretically and methodologically, what was that way that you found for yourself?

BUCHTHAL: Well, it was from every point of view instigated and initiated by both Panofsky and Saxl. I just continued their methods into my field, which I mostly did unconsciously. There was just a certain way of thinking one had learned working under Panofsky, which would be obvious in everything we do.

SMITH: Were the humanistic references and the depth of the humanistic tradition that Panofsky brought to bear in his essays as relevant in looking at liturgical art from Byzantium?

BUCHTHAL: Well, not a *sub speciae* liturgical, but he would interpret every miniature from his approach, and that would be helpful to us. Pinder, whom I mentioned yesterday, would hardly look at a written text. He said that's an interest that does not belong to the history of art; whereas, I was a humble follower of Schlosser, who wrote the monumental work on art-historical written sources [*La letteratura artistica*]. One has to read contemporary written works in order to appreciate the artistic qualities.

SMITH: How deep a scholar of Byzantine theology did you have to become?

BUCHTHAL: I did not go into it deeply enough, I'm sorry to say. One really



has to know a lot about the liturgy. When you asked yesterday about the relation of Byzantine art history to other branches of Byzantine study, I thought about it for a bit, and my answer is that Byzantine art history practically stands separately on its own feet. The Byzantine manuscripts we have are practically exclusively religious—biblical or liturgical. There are one or two historical chronicles and scientific manuscripts with rather crude drawings, but the main subject of the illuminator was either the Old Testament or the gospels, or even more so, the lectionary. The lectionaries were arranged in the way the various texts were to be read during the liturgy; you see immediately when you open a Byzantine manuscript that it either starts with the Gospel of St. Matthew or with St. John. If it starts with St. Matthew, it's a gospel; if it starts with St. John, it's a lectionary. A recently published article by a German scholar goes astray in this because it doesn't realize that difference. The lectionary was of course the leading book during the Byzantine divine service, and it was especially luxuriously decorated. The precious bindings, for instance, are found practically only in lectionaries. The lectionary was on the altar and was the most important book in the Byzantine church. Otherwise, what we have are to a large extent just gospel books with evangelists' portraits. That's why it is very difficult to draw comparisons between these books and other aspects of Byzantine culture—they are strictly limited to this theological, liturgical subject.



SMITH: What about the scholars in Greece and Turkey, did you have much interaction with them?

BUCHTHAL: In Turkey there are not very many. The scholars who have stood out in Turkey are mainly architectural historians. After all, they have the monuments on Turkish soil, and they have done very good work in that field. In Greece there are now some very remarkable art historians who work the way I work. But the main center in Western Europe, in any case in the first half of this century, was Munich, where Karl Krumbacher was the scholar who inaugurated Byzantine studies. He was the first professor of Byzantine studies in Munich university, and practically everybody was his direct pupil or was indebted to him. The chair is still the most respected chair in Germany for Byzantine studies.

SMITH: Did you go to hear him lecture?

BUCHTHAL: No, Krumbacher himself died before the First World War. I knew some of his successors, especially Hans Georg Beck, who was still active until a few years ago. I knew him from Dumbarton Oaks.

SMITH: I guess Egypt is also an important center for Byzantine studies.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, unfortunately I have only once been to Egypt, in 1939, just before the war. I stayed in Cairo for three months and came to know it really well. I should have liked to go back, but now I suppose it's out of the question.

SMITH: These are very poor countries, I guess you could say they're third



world countries. Is there anything about the relationship of these countries to their past and to the west that raises problems?

BUCHTHAL: In Egypt there was a complete break from the seventh century on, when the Mohammedans took over. The Copts, the Egyptian Christians, were not very highly regarded when I was there, but theoretically they were well recognized. There is a Coptic museum in Cairo with lots of old stones which aren't very conspicuous. Coptic art is mostly not very attractive, but in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the Copts came into contact first with Byzantium and then with the Latin west, they produced some outstanding works. There are few important manuscripts left, and they are not so well known. In a way this also applies to Syria. There are gospels in Syriac with illustrations, but there are few of them. They are influenced on the one hand by Byzantium and on the other hand by Islamic Egypt. These interrelations are a fascinating field of study.

SMITH: That would not be court art would it? With Byzantine art you have the imperial centers, and with Syriac and I guess Coptic art, you would not have the court sponsoring, is that correct?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: It would be more popular?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. In any case, those few manuscripts that have survived were





found in very provincial monasteries and were from the beginning intended for monastic use. They are a typically monastic art.

SMITH: In your book of essays [*Art of the Mediterranean World, AD 100 to 1400*], the introduction mentions that one of your major contributions has been the relationship of metropolitan and provincial art, and I wanted to ask you how you would summarize your findings?

BUCHTHAL: That was a long time ago, but I'm a bit old-fashioned and I still think that the provinces were mostly influenced by the capital. My own studies have mainly been concerned with works from Constantinople, though one of my earlier studies concerned manuscripts from Syria and Egypt.

SMITH: The revival of traditions of secular illustration was also mentioned. Was that in the context of religious art only?

BUCHTHAL: No, there are secular manuscripts. Weitzmann has published quite a number of them. He had a far larger vision of the whole thing than I ever had. It stands to reason that in secular art the classical tradition died much harder than in religious art, especially in astrological manuscripts, which are to some extent direct copies of perished late antique manuscripts. Some of them are very beautiful, but there are very few of them.

SMITH: When you began to work on the *Historia Troiana* and *The Musterbuch of Wolfenbüttel*, you were then working on the relationship of Byzantine and



"western art." What led you back in the westerly direction?

BUCHTHAL: Well, the history of Troy is mainly known to us through western illustrations. Saxl had always been very interested in the story of Troy, and I think you'll find an article by him in his collected essays, on the history of Troy; that put me on my way. Then I went to Madrid early in the 1950s when going in Spain was still extremely difficult and unpleasant. I looked at manuscripts in the National Library, and it turned out that nobody had looked at them for a long time, and a great deal could be gained by looking at them. I published a few of them, and among them is a fourteenth-century book on the Trojan war, which was definitely influenced by the famous manuscript the Vienna Genesis, one of the two or three remaining fifth- and sixth-century Greek luxury productions. There is still a lot to be studied in Madrid; but they are now more careful in showing their stuff. In those days, just after the war, in the early fifties, the manuscripts were perhaps too easily accessible.

[Tape III, Side Two]

BUCHTHAL: Now the library is swamped by American students, as is every other library in Europe, and there are restrictions on the handing out of manuscripts.

SMITH: In 1949 you became a lecturer in history of art; that was at the Courtauld?



BUCHTHAL: No, at the Warburg.

SMITH: Your students were primarily University of London students?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, but they were mainly Courtauld Institute students. Anthony Blunt at the time thought it would be a very good introduction for them to have to follow a course on early Christian and Byzantine art, which was otherwise hardly taught at the Courtauld.

SMITH: How broad a scope did you bring to this class? What did you cover?

BUCHTHAL: I covered quite a lot, but perhaps rather superficially.

SMITH: Was it a lecture course?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, it was six or, occasionally, even ten lectures, each one devoted to one problem.

SMITH: When you became professor of history in Byzantine art in '61, did that mean a change in what you were doing?

BUCHTHAL: No, not at all. It was a pure formality—a status symbol, as it were.

SMITH: So you were still at the Warburg as a research associate, then?

BUCHTHAL: No, as a professor of Byzantine art. I had to teach that field wherever it was wanted within the university, which wasn't very much.

SMITH: Did you have graduate students who were working on their Ph.D.s?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, very few, but I had some. I had more later on, in the U.S.



SMITH: Since you were working within the British university system, was your relationship to the students similar or different from the general relationship that you had with your professors in Hamburg?

BUCHTHAL: Well, Hamburg is not a fair comparison because things were so upset during my Hamburg years. I had only two or three semesters in Hamburg.

SMITH: And then the Nazis—

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Well, officially, it was two years, but during one of them Panofsky was on leave, so Saxl took over and he thought it would be a good thing if he taught general subjects, which would be more appreciated than early Christian art, so he lectured on Titian and Velázquez and Rembrandt, his great loves. I never attended those lectures because I was not in Hamburg at that time. You know how my Ph.D. came into being?

SMITH: Right—it sounded rather rushed.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. After that, it took me five years to get the book out.

SMITH: Why did you decide to come to New York to go to the Institute of Fine Arts? What were the factors there?

BUCHTHAL: I just got an offer. I had been a guest at Columbia for one year, and the head of department at Columbia was Rudolf Wittkower.

SMITH: Yes, and you had known him?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, for many years. We were very friendly. He had the





possibility of bringing over one scholar from outside every year, and he offered it to me in 1961 I think, just when we had bought this house. I liked it there very much and I lectured a great deal also in other places, and that's how the director of the Institute of Fine Arts came to know of me.

SMITH: You knew of the institute previously, since Panofsky had taught there.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, but I had no contact with the institute before I taught at Columbia. Then the next year Craig [Hugh] Smyth offered me a chair at the institute, and I went over for good in '65 I think.

SMITH: How much of a change was that for you in terms of the kind of academic environment you were used to?

BUCHTHAL: It was a complete change, because here, in London, I practically had all my time to myself and could do research, and over there I had to prepare lectures all the time. I couldn't do much scholarly work then.

SMITH: Did they give you a sabbatical?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, they were very generous. In addition to the sabbatical they offered their professors one term off every three years, and that was a great help. I made the condition that I was not bound to live in New York during that term off, because I had seen that others who did stay in New York were free not to lecture but were constantly bothered and troubled with university business and examinations and so on. So I made it perfectly clear that I would go to Europe



or somewhere else during those terms. It was a very nice arrangement. The institute was an exceedingly pleasant place in my time. The director was Craig Smyth, and his human touch was really marvelous.

SMITH: I'm sure they brought you with the hopes that your presence would attract students who wanted to do Byzantine studies.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, and they were right; the whole country is now full of former students who had their Ph.D. with me and preached the gospel in the United States.

SMITH: Could you compare your teaching methods with Panofsky's.

BUCHTHAL: I wouldn't dare, but Panofsky was not such an outstanding lecturer. First of all, he had a very heavy accent. His written English was beautiful, but his accent always detracted from his lectures. More important, he had a much broader scope than I have.

SMITH: I was wondering how you went about helping your students select their dissertation topics. How did that process take place?

BUCHTHAL: Mostly out of my seminars; they were limited to ten people, and I could discuss subjects. Usually I gave two or three introductory lectures every term, and then they had to produce reports. Quite a number of dissertations came out of those reports. During those ten years there were about twelve students who wrote dissertations for me. The students were wonderful. Four



years ago, for my eightieth birthday, a group of them came over to London, just for a few days, to conduct a seminar for me. It was very gratifying.

SMITH: Would the dissertation subjects more likely come from you, knowing what needed to be done, or would the students come up with the topics?

BUCHTHAL: They were mostly suggested by my teaching.

SMITH: I see. During your stays in the U.S., you became close to Panofsky again.

BUCHTHAL: Yes. He was at Princeton and while we lived in New York he constantly came to see us, stayed overnight with us, and he also brought me to the Institute for Advanced Study several times. I spent three or four full years there, also when his successor, Millard Meiss, had taken over.

SMITH: Did the American Panofsky seem different from the German Panofsky?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. When I first came to know him he reflected the academic attitude of the 1920s—no wonder. He was much more *savant*, if I may say so, in New York.

SMITH: Do you think his teaching ideas had changed?

BUCHTHAL: No, but he limited his research mostly to the Renaissance, with the exception of the two books on Abbot Sugerius of Saint-Denis, which had been a subject on which he had already taught in Hamburg and published. Otherwise, he felt he should keep to his own field, the Renaissance, and to some extent,



baroque—Poussin and so on. That is also best explained through the personal situation at Princeton where Charles Morey and Bert [Albert Mathias] Friend and that whole group introduced early Christian and Byzantine art into American art-historical studies where it had hardly existed before. Panofsky, quite rightly, did not agree with Morey's theories, so he thought it was a better thing to keep out and build up his own field in Renaissance studies.

SMITH: Did you know Albert Friend well?

BUCHTHAL: Oh yes, very well.

SMITH: Kurt Weitzmann referred to him as one of the most brilliant people he had known.

BUCHTHAL: He was brilliant, much more so than Morey, but he was also very difficult. He was very scheming and planning and had his fingers in every pie. He published two or three small and important articles, but never a book. But he was a brilliant teacher.

SMITH: If he never published much, how do we know that he was brilliant?

BUCHTHAL: From his lectures, and from his inspired conversation.

SMITH: So he was somebody who could inspire people?

BUCHTHAL: Kurt Weitzmann, for instance, was very much inspired by him.

SMITH: Now did the people he inspired produce significant work, in your viewpoint?





BUCHTHAL: A few, yes. But somehow this whole movement of Morey, Friend, and so on has petered out, and now Morey mainly survives as the founder of the Index of Christian Art, perhaps less as a scholar. He really had the mind of a philologist. Friend and Weitzmann, on the other hand, always agreed about most of the essential things. Still, it was Morey who brought Weitzmann to Princeton, but later on they quarreled bitterly, even openly, in seminars, because Weitzmann could not accept Morey's ideas. But Morey has the great merit of having inaugurated Byzantine art studies in the United States, and having founded the Index of Christian Art; that's very much to his credit.

SMITH: Was Friend getting control over funding sources? Was he drying up funds for projects that didn't appeal to him?

BUCHTHAL: I do not know. In any case, Friend never had official responsibility for the way the department was conducted.

SMITH: You've spent a fair amount of time at Dumbarton Oaks, correct?

BUCHTHAL: Yes.

SMITH: What is the importance of a center like Dumbarton Oaks for a field like Byzantine studies? How does it help the field to have a research center of that nature?

BUCHTHAL: There we come back to a point we covered earlier in this talk; that Byzantine art stands by itself, and there is and always was a division among



the temporary members at Dumbarton Oaks. The art historians kept together, and the other scholars kept together; there wasn't much interplay and exchange of ideas.

SMITH: Was there competition for funding?

BUCHTHAL: That I really don't know because I never saw their files. I don't know who applied and did not succeed.

SMITH: Well, I mean in terms of the funding that you tried to get to support your research, did you feel that you were in competition with other historians?

BUCHTHAL: No, when I first came to Dumbarton Oaks, in 1950, it was a very small place, and that I was invited at all was in the first instance due to Sirarpie Der Nersessian, a wonderful person.

SMITH: Oh, right. You had met her in Paris, right?

BUCHTHAL: I had met her in Paris, yes, as early as 1931, when she was Gabriel Millet's assistant and I was still a student. I think my first invitation to come to Dumbarton Oaks was her doing. We were friendly until she died, aged ninety something, two years ago. Whenever I was in Paris I went to see her. She was just adorable. Friend realized her potential and got her out of teaching at her university and offered her this post at Dumbarton Oaks, where she could do her own work. She left an enormous bulk of material on Armenian illuminated manuscripts. She never got around to publishing it all, but she



prepared it in such a way that it could be finished by somebody else. It was the ideal thing for her, which she wouldn't have found anywhere else—to do just her own work. During one of my stays at Dumbarton Oaks, I was assigned the room which had previously been hers. I thought it was an extraordinary distinction.

SMITH: I wanted to go back to a question which I had asked you earlier, but I don't think I phrased it properly. In the iconological method, the stylistic motifs of antiquity have tremendous power to recur in later societies that have been touched by them. To what do you attribute this residual power of antiquity to manifest itself?

BUCHTHAL: At first it was unconscious, of course, but this movement originated in Italy and then France where so many Roman monuments still stood, and still stand, and they were admired and copied. And later on, from the fourteenth or fifteenth century onwards, it was a very conscious revival by the first Renaissance generation.

SMITH: Do you think there's something particular about the motifs of Greco-Roman culture that gave them this staying power, not only in the west but in Byzantium and Islamic countries and Gandhara?

BUCHTHAL: It was just a matter of course, something that was not to be doubted, the superiority of classical antiquity. We still learn Greek and Latin these days and feel that a knowledge of Latin makes you a better person, makes



you understand life from a different point of view and so on.

SMITH: In the Gandhara work you talk about migration of images, and that was one of Panofsky's concepts, but I'd like you to explain that concept to me in terms of how it applied to Gandhara or to Sicily. What did that concept mean to those of you who were working in the iconological tradition?

BUCHTHAL: Sicily is a very different case because it was part of the Byzantine cultural empire. It was a strange mixture of cultures, just as it had been in Spain, in Toledo, where the difference between a twelfth-century church and a twelfth-century synagogue was negligible. In Sicily there were the Arabs, the Mohammedans, who continued even after the conquest by the Germans.

Gandhara represented the general tendency of the Roman empire to expand, and especially expand towards the east. Alexander the Great had started it, and in a way it continued. You have those isolated centers of classical culture all over the middle east.

SMITH: Sometimes Panofsky is associated with semiotics and structuralism; have you looked into either semiotics or structuralism?

BUCHTHAL: No.

SMITH: In the last fifteen years, art history has been very much inundated by post-structuralist criticism and deconstruction and feminist theory; do you see these new developments making a contribution to Byzantine studies?





BUCHTHAL: I know very little about them, but I don't think they make an important contribution. In any case, I never saw a difference between a male and a female Byzantinist.

SMITH: So they have not affected the Byzantine field significantly, in your view?

BUCHTHAL: No, I don't think so.

SMITH: What is the difference now between the Byzantine field and where it stood in 1930, when you started out?

BUCHTHAL: Well, the field has expanded enormously. When I first was in Istanbul, in 1932, I used to complain that there were hardly any Byzantine works of art to be seen. Since then, the mosaics in the Hagia Sophia and other churches have been uncovered and they opened up a new world for us. I was fortunate to be in Istanbul several times during the moments when they made important discoveries. I could see them on the spot. I was twice up in the cupola in Hagia Sophia—quite an experience. You are so far removed from the floor that you feel you are not really inside the church any more.

SMITH: You cowrote a book with Hans Belting [*Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople*]. Was he a student of yours?

BUCHTHAL: No, I met him as a young scholar, first at Dumbarton Oaks. We were very friendly and he asked me on one of my trips to Germany to stay with



him, which I did. It turned out we were both interested in the same problems and I proposed to him that we should publish this jointly. It so happened that that book was very neatly divided. Some chapters were mine and others were his. But the collaboration did not go quite as smoothly as we both had hoped. Still, this was over fifteen years ago and no longer counts.

SMITH: Do you do all your writing in English now?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Well, occasionally I write in German. The last two little notes were in German because they were written for a German public. As a rule I write in English, even when I write for German periodicals.

SMITH: Did you ever consider going back to Germany after 1945?

BUCHTHAL: I was several times offered rather tempting positions, but in the end I rejected them. I don't know whether it was the right thing to do or not, but I didn't go back for good.

SMITH: You have returned to Germany frequently.

BUCHTHAL: Quite often. The last place I revisited was Berlin, the town of my birth. That was around 1957, but I had been going back since the early fifties to other places, and I made friends in Cologne and Frankfurt and Freiburg and so on—especially in Freiburg, which meant a great deal to me because that's where Panofsky had started. He had his Ph.D. under [Wilhelm] Vöge, who was an outstanding figure in his days.



SMITH: I'm getting close to the end of my questions, but I'd like to ask you where you think the future direction of Byzantine studies is likely to go. At the current moment, what do you feel are the most pressing problems that art historians need to address?

BUCHTHAL: The conservation of the churches in Istanbul and elsewhere, which are falling into ruins and for which there's no money to preserve them. The Turks don't even have the money to preserve their own Islamic monuments, so it's understandable that they don't care too much for Byzantine ones. This would be a major task. Other tasks have been resolved. When I started, there were hardly any catalogs of libraries with illuminated manuscripts. Now, even Mount Sinai and Patmos have been cataloged and most of the catalogs have been published, so that material is accessible. On the other hand, it would now probably be much more difficult to see the original manuscripts than it was when I went to Sinai and to Athos many years ago. When I started, there were still an infinite number of illuminated manuscripts to be discovered and to be published, and this has practically all been done by now.

SMITH: It seemed from my research that you have been responsible for identifying three new schools of illumination. Is that correct?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, probably. I never counted them. But I became interested in late Byzantine art, a field which is rather difficult. More manuscripts survived



than from the early period, but the material is so abundant and so diversified that it is very difficult to get some order into it.

SMITH: Do you think that further research will be able to identify even more specifically the different ateliers?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I think so. We now know quite a lot about single manuscripts like the Paris Psalter, but there is still a lot to be done about later manuscripts, especially about their relation to the liturgy.

SMITH: Yesterday, you mentioned that your wife was a puppet maker.

BUCHTHAL: Yes, she worked for the Swiss railways. She is no longer a practicing artist.

SMITH: Did she continue her career most of your married life?

BUCHTHAL: Certainly through the war and the immediate postwar years. We were very hard up then and her work really was needed. Now she still takes an active interest in what is being done in the way of contemporary art and industrial art, but she doesn't really work in the field.

SMITH: So she left the field of art and she went to get a job?

BUCHTHAL: Only before and during the war.

SMITH: What kind of work did she do then?

BUCHTHAL: She worked for the Swiss railways here in London. It was the director of the Swiss railways who persuaded her to move to London when she





couldn't get a working permit in Switzerland.

SMITH: Has she been able to travel with you on your research trips?

BUCHTHAL: Mostly, yes. Not in the early years, because then she had to look after our daughter, but for the last ten or twenty years she has traveled with me.

SMITH: About Ernst Gombrich. There has been some recent controversy about his characterization of Aby Warburg [referring to Gombrich's book *Aby*

*Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*] and some younger scholars have challenged it. How do you feel about that controversy? Do you think that Gombrich's assessment of Aby Warburg will stand the test of time?

BUCHTHAL: Yes, I think it will stand the test of time. The scholar who challenged it was older than Gombrich, and his criticism was also a matter of personal spite.

SMITH: In terms of the interaction between Byzantine scholars and art historians who are not Byzantinists, did you find it fruitful just to sit down, say, with somebody like Gombrich or Rudolf Wittkower and just talk about what you were doing?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Gombrich is quite extraordinary in the multiplicity of his interests. Have I mentioned Otto Kurz?

SMITH: You mentioned him a couple of times. He was Gombrich's closest friend, wasn't he?



BUCHTHAL: Yes. He died, unfortunately, immediately after his retirement, when he was still in his late sixties and he could have worked a great deal. He was an extraordinary person, of unique knowledge and understanding and insight. We all loved him.

SMITH: When we look at the generation that includes you and Weitzmann and Kurz and Demus, and [Ernst] Kitzinger, was there in a sense a division of labor amongst you that developed?

BUCHTHAL: In a way, yes. I mainly did manuscripts, Demus and Kitzinger did mosaics, and most of the others were not really specialized in the Byzantine field and worked also on other subjects.

SMITH: Did that division of labor develop spontaneously in a sense?

BUCHTHAL: Yes. Kurz was above it all; he knew everything. There wasn't a single thing in this world he didn't know and appreciate. You could ask him any question and he would be able to give you within a minute or two a very good answer. Those who knew him well, for instance his teacher, Julius von Schlosser, had very high regard for him. Von Schlosser proposed him as the editor of the English edition of the *Kunstliteratur*, which was a very great distinction.



## INDEX

- American University (Beirut), 37, 38  
*Art of the Mediterranean World, AD 100 to 1400*, 68
- Baruzi, Jean, 7  
 Beck, Hans Georg, 66  
 Belting, Hans, 80, 81  
 Bibliotheca Hertziana, 19  
 Bibliothèque Nationale, 23, 24  
 Bing, Gertrud, 15, 16, 41, 49  
 Blunt, Anthony, 60, 61, 70  
 Bode Museum, 2  
 Buchthal, Amalia Serkin (wife), 2, 32, 46, 49, 83, 84  
 Buchthal, Anna Gerda (sister), 3, 40, 44  
 Buchthal, Eugen (father), 1  
 Buchthal, Theresa (mother), 1  
 Buchthal, Wolfgang (brother), 3  
 Byzantine art, 5, 6, 9, 12, 23-26, 33-39, 52, 53, 61-68, 75, 76, 79-82
- Cassirer, Ernst, 26, 27  
 Clark, Kenneth, 19  
 Columbia University, 71, 72  
 Coptic art, 67, 68  
 Courtauld Institute, 48, 60-62, 69, 70
- David, Percival, 50  
 Demus, Otto, 33, 85  
 Der Nersessian, Sirarpie, 77, 78  
 Dilthey, Heinrich, 20, 21  
 Dumbarton Oaks, 22, 66, 76-78, 80  
 Dvořák, Max, 16
- Feld, Otto, 24, 25  
 Fischer-Dieskau, Dietrich, 4  
 Focillon, Henri, 7-9  
 Foucher, Alfred, 57, 58  
 Friend, Albert Mathias, 75-77
- Gandharan art, 6, 56, 58, 59, 78, 79  
 Gennadion, 36, 37  
 George, Stefan, 22  
 Ghent Altarpiece, 2  
 Gilson, Etienne, 7  
 Goldschmidt, Adolph, 11, 12, 24  
 Gombrich, E.H., 17, 46, 47, 60, 62, 84  
 Grabar, André, 36  
 Grabar, Oleg, 36  
 Gundolf, Friedrich, 6
- Hagia Sophia, 80  
 Hamann, Richard, 31  
 Heidegger, Martin, 21  
 Herrmann, Wolfgang, 3  
 Hinks, Roger, 46  
*Historia Troiana*, 68  
 Horn, Walter, 31  
 Husserl, Edmund, 21
- Iconoclasm, 33, 34  
 Iconography, 9, 12, 35, 57, 58  
 Iconology, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 24, 34, 64, 65, 78, 79  
 Index of Christian Art, 76  
 Institute for Advanced Study, 74  
 Institute of Fine Arts (NYU), 13, 59, 71, 72  
 Internment (World War II), 51  
 Islamic art, 5, 37, 38, 54, 82



- Kaiser-Friedrich Museum, 2, 3  
 Kantorowicz, Ernst, 21, 22  
 Katzenellenbogen, Adolf, 30, 31  
 Kitzinger, Ernst, 85  
 Kramrisch, Stella, 59  
*Kristallnacht*, 44  
 Krumbacher, Karl, 66  
 Kurz, Otto, 17, 59, 60, 84, 85
- Lazarev, Viktor, 62, 63  
 Lechter, Melchior, 22  
 Liebeschütz, Hans, 27, 28
- Mâle, Emile, 7, 8  
 manuscript illumination, 52-55, 65, 68, 69, 82, 83  
 Master of Flémalle, 29, 30  
 Meier, Hans, 50  
 Meiss, Millard, 74  
 Mercklin, Eugen von, 28, 29  
 Millet, Gabriel, 35, 77  
*Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*, 9, 23-26, 53, 83  
 Morey, Charles Rufus, 26, 75, 76  
 Music, 2, 18, 31, 32, 41  
*Musterbuch of Wolfenbüttel, The* 68, 69
- Nazism, 30, 40-44, 48, 49
- Paleography, 27, 32  
 Panofsky, Erwin, 6, 8-15, 18, 22-26, 28-32, 34, 35, 39, 49, 53, 63, 64, 71-75, 79, 81  
 Paris Psalter (see *Miniatures of the Paris Psalter*)  
*Patronage in Thirteenth-Century Constantinople*, 80  
 Pergamon Museum, 3  
 Photography, 34, 35
- Pinder, Wilhelm, 10, 11, 34, 64  
 Psalter of Queen Melisende, 54, 55
- Rickert, Heinrich, 20, 21  
 Riegl, Alois, 15
- Salomon, Richard, 27  
 Saxl, Fritz, 5, 14-19, 23, 32, 33, 45, 48, 49, 59, 60, 63, 64, 71  
 Schlosser, Julius von, 16, 17, 64, 85  
 Schoenberg, Arnold, 31  
 Sedlmayr, Hans, 17  
 Serkin, Rudolf, 32  
 Simmel, Georg, 20  
 Smyth, Craig Hugh, 72, 73  
 Strzykowski, Josef, 17
- Toesca, Pietro, 55  
 Toscanini, Arturo, 49
- Valentin, Kurt, 22  
 Van der Weyden, Rogier, 29, 30  
 Van Eyck, Jan, 2, 13  
 Vöge, Wilhelm, 81, 82
- Warburg, Aby, 17-19, 58, 84  
 Warburg Bibliothek (Hamburg), 15, 18  
 Warburg Institute (London), 45-47, 59, 60, 70  
 Weber, Max, 19  
 Weimar Republic, 40  
 Weitzmann, Kurt, 12, 24-26, 33, 68, 75, 76, 85  
 Wind, Edgar, 49  
 Wittkower, Rudolf, 61, 71, 72, 84  
 Wölfflin, Heinrich, 43  
 Wormald, Francis, 46
- Zwemmer, Desmond, 61













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